




**PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TOOLKIT
FOR NEW AND BEGINNING TEACHERS**

FEELINGS OF ISOLATION

SEGMENT #1: DEVELOPING A RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR MENTOR

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The Commonwealth Educational Policy Institute

L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs

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PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TOOLKIT
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A project administered by

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Professional Development Toolkit for New and Beginning Teachers



The PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TOOLKIT FOR NEW AND BEGINNING TEACHERS is a research-based video streamed program with accompanying resource documents. The program is an outgrowth of a previous Commonwealth Educational Policy Institute (CEPI) online mentoring study at Virginia Commonwealth University. The findings of the online mentoring study revealed twelve topics new and beginning teachers felt additional university training would have led them to more effective use of best practices in the classroom. In this program, each of the twelve topics is presented in two to six stand alone video segments. The total number of segments is forty five. Suggested uses, in addition to personal viewing by K-12 teachers for self improvement, include professional development, mentor and mentee, university prospective teacher, and small or large group training.

The facilitators are university faculty and practitioners with field experience. Each is currently involved in teacher training or serves as a staff development administrator. All are currently engaged in educational research, teaching and/or educational policy development.

The teachers in the video programs are classroom teachers. Some of them were participants in the 2006 Online Mentoring Study in which the topics for this project were identified. They represent all disciplines in K-12 grades.

Resource documents for the programs are provided as PDF files to facilitate the use of the 45 video segments. The first set of documents is composed of: (1) a description of the project, (2) an introduction to program facilitators, including a definition of each topic, and a list of the video segments, and (3) a research formative study summary that helped to guide the project's development. The second set of documents is composed of: (1) a description of the project, (2) a full text transcript for each video segment, (3) a set of problems and solutions related to each video segment in the form of a work-study guide, and (4) an annotated bibliographic summary of references and Internet links for each transcript. Many of the organizations and agencies referenced in the transcripts are actively involved in the development of video and professional development presentations that support policy and advocacy.

Every reasonable effort is made to present current and accurate information. Internet content, however, does appear, disappear and change over time. CEPI, as a university-based educational policy research institute endorses no specific position of any listed group.

FEELINGS OF ISOLATION

SEGMENT #1: DEVELOPING A RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR MENTOR

VIDEO SEGMENT TRANSCRIPT

Feelings of Isolation: Feeling lonesome, anxious, and alone in classroom with limited resources and assistance. Having no clear-cut recipe or "how to do it" guide to manage an unexpected problem; or fear related to appearing incompetent to peers.

Facilitator: Dr. [Tammy Milby](#), Reading Faculty
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AUDIO	VIDEO
<p>Research demonstrates that building a personal, trusting relationship with your mentor will be beneficial to your teaching. Beginning teachers who collaborate with more experienced teachers benefit by receiving social and emotional support. Mentors help new teachers better understand school culture, curriculum expectations, and the different roles a teacher may face (Gordon, 2004).</p> <p>Welcome to this program! My name is Dr. Tammy Milby. I am on the faculty in the Department of Teaching & Learning at Virginia Commonwealth University. Today, I would like to share tips for collaborating and utilizing your mentor to build opportunities for success.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Begin by getting to know each other as people and professionals.• Plan different types of meetings with your mentor. When you start your relationship, establish the parameters you will both follow to work well together. Setting shared expectations will help you create a positive working relationship. Schedule ongoing, formal meetings on a regular basis for reflection on how things have been going. In addition to these scheduled meetings, it is helpful to agree that you will have 'drop-in' times just to talk about how things are going over a cup of coffee or tea or to discuss a specific problem or issue.• Don't be afraid to confide in your mentor. Mentoring relationships work best when the mentor and mentee have compatible educational philosophies and personalities and are located close to one another. For example, they both teach within the same school building. However, don't worry if this is not possible in your situation. You can still develop a situation that facilitates your support. First, your mentor needs to be	<p>DR. MILBY</p>

aware of the difficulties you face in order to help you resolve any issues that are occurring. Sometimes, beginning teachers feel nervous about confiding the things that they do not already know or feel uncertainty about.

DON'T BE AFRAID TO SHARE! Even experienced teachers are still learning and educators must collaborate together to meet our goals of helping students. Visit your mentor often and recognize that your mentor is also benefiting from the relationship. For example, more experienced teachers who mentor new teachers experience greater confidence, enhanced understanding of different teaching perspectives, and career rejuvenation.

Here is a list of possible topics that you might collaborate on together with your mentor:

- Orientation to the community, families, school system, curriculum, and school campus
- Conducting overviews of the teacher handbook and school policies and procedures
- Assistance with delivery of instruction and building student engagement
- Support with classroom management practices
- Feedback on assessment practices
- Providing encouragement, advice, and emotional support which reduces your feelings of isolation
- Support with paperwork and other administrative responsibilities
- Sharing resources and materials
- Developing communication facilitation between beginning teachers and colleagues
- Adapting and developing insights into the school culture
- Help with balancing of responsibilities including time management and stress
- Scheduling for personal and professional development opportunities including opportunities for co-teaching or peer coaching

Remember, this is a non-evaluative relationship and it is fine to utilize your mentor if you just need someone to talk to or to share a funny story. Communicating effectively is a two-way process. If you feel that you are not hearing from your mentor enough, initiate that call, email, or visit. You will feel more confident knowing that you have support.

<p>Let's hear from some of our teachers about their experiences when working with a mentor."</p> <p>My name is Jamie Baumgardner. This is my fourth year teaching but my first year in this school system. I teach English. Because it is my first year in the county, I have been assigned a buddy. I do not need to have official meetings with my buddy, but we talk on a regular basis because we teach in the same content courses. My buddy has a lot of experience teaching English and has been quite helpful in the English department.</p> <p>Even though I don't need the support of a mentor like a first year teacher would, having a buddy has removed a lot of the stress associated with the transfer to a new school. Each school is so different and has so many 'unwritten' rules, that a buddy is the perfect person to help a beginning teacher adjust to a new environment. My buddy has been very helpful as I have gotten acclimated to my new school.</p> <p>Overall, I feel that developing a relationship with a mentor or buddy is extremely beneficial. The best thing about my having a buddy or mentor is having someone I can go to when I need a quick answer to a last minute question or I have something routine I need an experienced teacher to explain.</p> <p>My name is William Berry and I am a second year social studies teacher at Tuckahoe Middle School. Last year I was paired up with another teacher at my school. Guy served as my mentor during my first year. It was very beneficial to my career to have him as my mentor, not just for my growth professionally, but for my sanity as well. Guy was an excellent mentor in terms of helping me become a better teacher. Whenever I felt uncomfortable with a specific lesson or teaching a specific topic, Guy was able to sit down with me and discuss certain ideas that had worked in his classroom. Guy was there to help make my classroom management easier from day one. He suggested seating arrangements, classroom rules, and specific management techniques that helped me have some semblance of control over my hormone-enraged 7th graders.</p> <p>Although having someone to bounce lesson ideas off of was extremely useful, I think the most important thing that Guy did was to just offer an ear and a shoulder when things were not going as well as I wanted. As a first year teacher, the other teachers you associate with are generally going to be as inexperienced as you are. When you have problems in class, you can commiserate with these teachers. However, talking to them does not do much to boost your morale, as they are generally suffering from the same problems you have in the classroom. Although it may seem like a waste of time when you're overloaded with work, it's great to have a mentor you can just sit down and talk to about the problems you're having in class. Yes, they can offer suggestions, but I've found that there are a number of things you just need to work through yourself no matter what advice you're given. But, it is always good to know that your mentor is there to constantly assure you that things will get better as you progress professionally; that you won't always be as stressed as you are in your first year (at least not for the same reasons!) and that things get easier as you go along (although no less hectic).</p> <p>Teaching can sometimes feel isolating. However, the time spent with you mentor will be rewarding for both of you. Forming this relationship will be beneficial both emotionally</p>	<p>JAMIE BAUMGARDNER</p> <p>WILLIAM BERRY</p> <p>DR. MILBY</p>
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and professionally. It is through collaboration that you will continue to grow professionally.	
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PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

Feelings of Isolation: Feeling lonesome, anxious, and alone in a classroom with limited resources and accessible assistance. Having no clear-cut recipe or "how to do it" guide to manage an unexpected problem; and fear of appearing incompetent to peers.

Ask yourself: What forms of support do you have as a new teacher? How are you dealing with isolation and stress in your job?

Suggested use for this module:

1. Analyze:

Please select one of the scenarios below and problem-solve a list of possible solutions. Record your ideas in the space provided. Discuss these ideas with your other educators (mentor, colleagues, or other beginning teachers).

2. View:

Watch the corresponding video on this topic. How does this information change your ideas?

3. Compare:

Revisit the scenario selected. Next, review the section entitled, "Possible Solutions" comparing the ideas listed with your own list.

4. Reflect:

How will you apply this new information to your current or future classroom? What goal will you set to help you begin to change your practices? What support is needed to help you accomplish this goal?

5. Apply:

List the first step towards change below. Create a timeline for success and place deadlines in your personal planner as a reminder. How will you know when you have met your goals?

Scenarios 1 & 2: Feelings of Isolation

Scenario 1:

Beth stated, "I'm exhausted and being so tired is actually affecting my performance in the classroom. I've started to notice that by the end of the week I was getting to a point where I was not functioning very well since I am running low on fuel. Things are getting to me that wouldn't have bothered me so much on Monday."

I noticed that the behavior of the kids has also been an issue. By the end of the week, things that I would have dealt with one way on Monday are escalating. I get so exhausted that the kids wind me up and this creates more stress as time goes along."

Consider this quote from Beth. How are her feelings influencing students? What suggestions do you have for her to improve her experiences?

Scenario 2:

Todd confessed, "What really gets to me more than anything else is not being able to take a break all day long. I have so many duties during lunch and planning time that I can hardly gobble down my sandwich and coffee. I shuffle down the hallways at a ridiculous speed trying to accomplish everything. I am beginning to feel like I live inside of my classroom."

Consider this quote from Todd. How is he coping with his responsibilities? What suggestions do you have to help him improve his situation?

Circle the scenario that you selected below:

Scenario 1

Scenario 2

Record a list of your own possible solutions here:

Summary & Goal Setting:

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Feelings of isolation and coping with stress are all normal parts of teaching. Teaching is a demanding profession which requires mental and physical strategies for tackling job stress. The first solution for most beginning teachers is to recognize your accomplishments and celebrate small successes. Conduct continuous self-evaluations and reevaluating what adjustments should be made in your teaching. Take on one thing to work on at a time. Remember, it gets much easier with time once you have established a repertoire of techniques for dealing with difficult situations. Your teaching mentor or another trusted teacher can help you cope and feel less isolated. Don't be afraid to talk to other teachers for support!

Here are 10 tips to help you rejuvenate and bring back your passion for teaching:

1. See the humorous side of the situation and take yourself less seriously
2. Do things for others
3. Talk to other people and seek opportunities for social support
4. Let go of being perfect- be honest with yourself and others
5. Develop healthy habits:
 - Rest and take breaks, stretch
 - Allow yourself to relax
 - Use deep breathing
 - Get more sleep
 - Eat more nutritious meals
 - Exercise
 - Avoid excess (including alcohol)
6. Delegate and learn to say 'no'
7. Stop solving everything for everyone
8. Find balance
 - Ask yourself: What hours do I teach? How much time does it take me to prepare and grade?
 - What time do I need for myself? What are my own personal commitments?
9. When things are not going well, reflect on the reason why. Don't be too hard on yourself. Learn from the experience and change it the next time. Seek professional growth opportunities such as

conferences, book chats, and websites to reconnect with other teacher who are experiencing similar problems

10. Celebrate and find joy in your career path. You are making such a difference for student's everyday! Believe in yourself!

ANNOTATED RESEARCH BIBLIOGRAPHY

- ❖ Beginning teachers contribute to their own isolation when they hesitate to ask for help. Many consider seeking help an admission of failure and incompetence. In fact, beginning teachers studied by Newberry (1978) went to great lengths to cover up serious problems with student discipline.

Gordon, Stephen. & Maxey, Susan. (2000). *How to help beginning teachers succeed*. Retrieved October 1, 2007, from http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/23/95/64.pdf (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED34166)

- ❖ It is critical for new teachers to surround themselves with exemplary experienced colleagues. In most schools, teachers work in settings where the sociocultural context, if not the actual physical structure, encourages little interaction among adults and can contribute to feelings of isolation and frustration. This can limit a new teacher's maturation and stifle professional growth.

Hicks, Cathy, Glasglow, Neal & McNary, Sarah. (2005). *What successful mentors do*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, p.10.

- ❖ Isolation is a widespread and chronic problem among teachers. It is related to stress overload, stagnation, and burnout. Isolation is not restricted to particular types of schools or levels of education.

Gaikwad, Samuel & Brantley, Paul. (1992). *Teacher isolation: loneliness in the classroom*. Adventist Education. p. 14.

- ❖ Strategies for alleviating teacher isolation include developing a climate of trust within the school, sharing decision-making power, and using professional development activities to improve communication and team-building skills among teachers. Additional strategies to consider include forming quality circles or other problem-solving committees, presenting meetings focused on the daily activities of staff members, requiring peer observation, increasing opportunities for staff social activities, encouraging attendance at professional meetings, conducting retreats for sharing values and attitudes, and planning regular informal meetings to discuss teaching techniques or new ideas gleaned from the professional literature.

Rothbert, Robert. (1985). *Improving school climate and reducing teacher isolation*. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 270855)

- ❖ Isolation comes in several forms:
 - Egg-crate isolation refers to a physical separateness where teachers have little contact with other professionals
 - Psychological isolation is a state of mind rather than a condition of the workplace. It involves the teacher's perceptions of collegial interactions.

- Adaptive isolation occurs when teachers are unable to meet the demands of adapting to new teaching strategies. They feel overwhelmed in trying to acquire new strategies.

Gaikwad, Samuel & Brantley, Paul. (1992). *Teacher isolation: loneliness in the classroom*.

Retrieved October 1, 2007, from

<http://circle.adventist.org/files/jae/jae199254041404.pdf>

- ❖ In response to a high rate of attrition, many state education associations have begun to focus on solving the problem of teacher isolation through formal mentoring programs.

Heider, Kelly. (2005). Teacher isolation: how mentoring programs can help. Retrieved October 1, 2007, from <http://cie.asu.edu/volume8/number14/index.html>

- ❖ Studies have shown that mentoring programs such as telementoring, mentoring by a veteran teacher, novice teacher learning communities, and peer coaching help keep new teachers motivated and enthusiastic while increasing their skills and self-efficacy.

Heider, Kelly. (2005). Teacher isolation: how mentoring programs can help. Retrieved October 1, 2007, from <http://cie.asu.edu/volume8/number14/index.html>

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Gates, G. S. (2007). *Emerging Thought and Research on Student, Teacher, and Administrator Stress and Coping*. Charlotte, NC: IAP.

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